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ABSTRACT

The intention of this paper is to provide added insights into the nature and implications of national accreditation for the growing academic field of public relations, to focus attention on the subject, and to promote further discussion and research relating to the matter. Specifically, the paper presents a brief historical review of accreditation of public relations programs by the American Council on Education for Journalism; a discussion of accrediting policies and procedures, including criteria applied in the evaluation of public relations programs; the results of a nationwide survey of opinions and attitudes of public relations educators relating to accreditation policies, strengths, weaknesses, and probable causes for the small number of accredited programs; and preliminary recommendations for future action. (Author/FL)

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NATIONAL ACCREDITATION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION:

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Describing public relations education as currently in a state of profound and potentially promising change appears to be a justifiable characterization of this relative newcomer to the academic scene. Unresolved, undefined--and even unidentified--questions and issues are also equally among its most distinguishing characteristics. These issues include, although certainly are not limited to: "What exactly is it now and what should it become?", "Who should teach it?", "What should be taught?", and even "Where should it be taught?" One aspect of public relations education that encompasses all of the above and more is national accreditation of the academic programs designed to accommodate the increasing student population at the university level nationwide.

Context and Problem

While the number of nationally accredited programs has increased significantly in the 22 years since the first public relations sequence was accredited, particularly in the past 11 years since the Public Relations Society of America became a member of the official accrediting organization, (the American Council on Education for Journalism), today there are still only 18 accredited public relations programs in the United States. This represents only about 5 percent of the several hundred colleges and universities currently offering degrees, sequences or elective courses in public relations.

This small, albeit improved, number of accredited public relations programs is a continuing cause for concern among educators and professionals, especially in light of the substantial growth of student

interest and of the number of schools now including expanded public relations curricula within mass communications programs and elsewhere. Agee, for example, reported as one of the "principal conclusions" of his comprehensive and valuable 1978 study that "public relations is an expanding field of study in the nation's schools and departments of journalism and mass communication."[1] He found net additions to the curricula of about three courses per school in approximately 60 percent of those schools offering public relations programs. Indications of this impressive growth of public relations education during its very brief academic history are beginning to be reasonably well documented[2] and slowly accepted by the journalistically dominated mass communications educators and within academe in general. With the first university-based course reportedly offered in 1923 and real growth not beginning until after World War II,[3] public relations is now offered at more than 320 institutions,[4] including at least 117 universities and four-year colleges that offer a major sequence or program of concentration.[5]

The extant research and literature relating to national accreditation of this substantial academic field appear even more limited than the number of accredited public relations programs. Curiously, the 1975

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[1]Warren K. Agee, "Recent and Projected Public Relations Curricular Changes in Schools of Journalism," (paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Seattle, Washington, August 14, 1978), p. 13.

[2]Paul V. Peterson, "Enrollment Surges Again, Increases 7% to 70,601," Journalism Educator,33 (January, 1979), 6; and "Journalism Schools Report Record 65,962 Enrollment," Journalism Educator 32 (January, 1978), 3.

[3]Ray Eldon Hiebert, Trends in Public Relations Education: 1964-1970 (New York: Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education, 1971), p.9.

[4]Albert Walker, Status and Trends of Public Relations Education in U.S. Senior Colleges and Universities: Report of Findings of Survey (New York: Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education, 1975), p.1.

[5]"Schools and Departments of Journalism," Journalism Educator 33 (January, 1979), 46-83.

report of the Commission on Public Relations Education did not devote much attention to accreditation.[6] The report noted only that "the recommendations of the Commission should conform in a general way to the accreditation requirements" of ACEJ.[7]

Two of the basic issues involving accreditation in general have been addressed in articles and papers. The question of the value of accreditation in relation to the expenses involved ($1,000 for one sequence and $400 for each additional sequence) was posed by Doug Newsom in a Matrix article covering the evolution of the over-all process since its beginning in 1946.[8] Second, several researchers have investigated the question of whether or not accredited curricula differ substantially from curricula in non-accredited schools. The most recent study dealing with news-editorial programs is Bob Carroll's 1977 Journalism Educator article which reported that "there are no significant differences in curricula between the two types of schools."[9] Agee, in the study cited earlier, reported a similar significant finding for public relations, although he noted that "the lowest correlation was . . . in comparing the accredited with the non-accredited rankings" relating to recent curricular changes in public relations offerings.[10]

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[6] A Design for Public Relations Education. The Report of the Commission on Public Relations Education. J. Carroll Bateman and Scott Cutlip, co-chairmen. (Association for Education in Journalism and Public Relations Society of America, 1975).

[7] Ibid, p. 5.

[8] Doug Newsom, "The Cost of Accreditation: Is it Worth it?," Matrix (Winter, 1976-1977), pp. 26-29.

[9] Bob A. Carroll, "Accredited, Non-Accredited News Curricular are Similar," Journalism Educator, 32 (April, 1977), p. 42.

[10] Agee, p. 10.

Two of the most recent and specific articles relating to accreditation of this academic discipline were those by J. Carroll Bateman and Donald Wright in Public Relations Journal.[11] Representing largely divergent positions on accreditation of public relations education, these authors provide a useful framework for our present analysis. In summarizing his evaluation of the present accrediting policies, Bateman stated:

> When all the facts are added up, it seems that for the time being, at least, we must accept the world of education as it is. That is, we must recognize that ACEJ is indeed the traditional and accepted (accrediting) organization of journalism school programs in public relations, as well as in other areas of communication.[12]

He then concluded:

> Finally, we must recognize that ACEJ does indeed do its job well. . . .
>
> Until we can do the job better through PRSA or some other organization--and that will take a long time--we ought to stop carping at the ACEJ program.[13]

Wright, however, not only posed pertinent criticism of current policies and membership of ACEJ, but also raised questions about what organization is best qualified to be the official accrediting body for public relations programs.

Purpose of Present Study

Recognizing the significance of national accreditation for the new, growing academic discipline, this study sought to initiate a comprehensive analysis of the crucial implications involved in the future enhancement

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[11] J. Carroll Bateman, "Accrediting Degree Programs in Public Relations Education," and Donald K. Wright, "Who Should Accredit Public Relations Education?" Public Relations Journal, 34, (July, 1978), pp. 22-29. Ironically, the journal transposed the concluding two paragraphs of Bateman's article with Wright's final three paragraphs. See "Editor's Notebook" in the subsequent (August) issue, p. 10.

[12] Bateman, 1978, p. 29.

[13] Bateman, 1978, p. 29.

of public relations education. Specifically, this paper presents: (1) a brief historical review of accreditation of public relations programs by ACEJ; (2) discussion of accrediting policies and procedures, including specific criteria applied in the evaluation of public relations programs; (3) results of a nationwide survey of opinions and attitudes of public relations educators relating to accreditation policies, strengths and weaknesses, and probable causes for the small number of accredited programs; and (4) preliminary recommendations for future action.

Historical Review

The first school to have an accredited program in public relations was the University of Oklahoma. The accreditation of the public relations sequence there occurred in the spring of 1957.[14] Over the next decade, public relations sequences at six more schools were accredited by the American Council on Education for Journalism. These were Boston University, University of Georgia, Ohio State University, Ohio University, San Jose State University, and the University of Texas at Austin. All of these were accredited before the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) joined ACEJ. Consequently, PRSA had no official representation on the accreditation teams that examined these programs.

PRSA's admission into ACEJ did not come about without difficulty or without some sharp differences of opinion among some of its members. The idea originated in 1966 when the incoming president of PRSA said in his inaugural address:

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[14]Letter from Dr. Milton Gross, secretary-treasurer, American Council on Education for Journalism, to co-author, dated March 22, 1979.

> Another important aspect of our plans for professional development should be machinery for approving those collegiate programs which we deem, after careful evaluation, to meet proper standards of preparation for admission to our field.[15]

This statement, which was made without awareness of the ACEJ program for accreditation of public relations sequences, brought a quick response from Professor Scott M. Cutlip, then at the University of Wisconsin. On November 30, 1966, he wrote to the president-elect of PRSA as follows:

> I've got news for you--this is already being done. And, lamentably, PRSA has in the past refused to contribute or participate in this program. Further, I don't think this is something that PRSA could effectively do unilaterally....
>
> This accreditation program is sponsored by the American Council on Education for Journalism, an organization composed of and supported by nine journalism organizations.... But not PRSA, though--after much urging on the part of journalism teachers who teach PR--it was invited to join. PRSA should have been pleased to get the invitation.
>
> I think PRSA must face up to this fact--public relations is an integral and important segment in the broad spectrum of journalism and this logically belongs in journalism education. Journalism educators are coming to accept this fact. Public Relations men will, too, in time....
>
> PRSA would make the quickest progress toward making its views felt in the matter of public relations accreditation by joining the American Council on Education for Journalism. It would be a mistake to pursue an independent course. I and most other journalism educators would strongly oppose such a move . . .
>
> My colleague, Professor Harold Nelson, the incoming president of the Association for Education in Journalism, shares my view. He says: PRSA would have hard sledding if it undertakes an independent course, but it could have a real influence along these lines if it became a member of ACEJ. The ACEJ is the only journalism accrediting agency recognized by the American Council on Education ....[16]

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[15] J. Carroll Bateman, "An Aristocracy of Excellence." Address to the 19th Annual Conference of the Public Relations Society of America, New York City, November 11, 1966. (Pamphlet in PRSA files.)

[16] Letter from Scott M. Cutlip to J. Carroll Bateman, dated November 30, 1966. (In PRSA files.)

Professor Walter W. Seifert of Ohio State University also reacted quickly. In preparation for a special seminar for public relations educators and practitioners interested in education, Seifert prepared a memorandum for the participants. In his memo, Seifert pointed out that a study by Professor Ray Hiebert of the University of Maryland conducted for PRSA in 1964 showed that about 280 U.S. colleges and universities were offering public relations courses, most of them being within the journalism-communications discipline. Seifert warned:

> If PRSA established its own academic accrediting program it would have no sanction among educators, who today are recruiting and training hundreds of young people for the profession. The writer suggests PRSA tell ACEJ . . . we take no stand on where PR should be taught or at what level. But we will join your academic accrediting process by paying $500 annually and supplying coverage to include institutions where PR sequences are taught outside journalism schools.[17]

This caveat concerning sequences taught outside the journalistic discipline was entered because of opposing points of view from other members of PRSA. The transcript of a PRSA-sponsored seminar for public relations educators and practitioners, which was held in New York March 31 and April 1, 1967, is indicative of this opposition.[18] Professor Raymond Simon of Utica College, Syracuse University is quoted in the transcript as follows:

> Before we get the idea that all is sweetness and light on the educational scene, I think it only fair to point out that there is a good deal of argument about the accreditation program among public relations educators. On the one hand we have the washed and the unwashed, the accredited schools and the unaccredited schools which feel they are doing a very competent job of educating people for the

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[17] Memorandum from Walter W. Seifert, Ohio State University, addressed to "All Concerned with Public Relations Education," dated February 25, 1967. (In PRSA files.)

[18] Public Relations Society of America, Transcript of Public Relations Education Seminar, New York City, March 31 and April 1, 1967. (In PRSA files.)

journalism profession. And I think I'm correct in saying that the accrediting program, in part, resulted in a split among journalism schools. There are roadblocks here that I think the Society ought to be well aware of. I think accrediting has a lot of positive things about it, but I also feel that we must recognize that the accrediting program has resulted in a great deal of dispute among journalism schools, so much so that I guess they have three separate entities under the umbrella of AEJ.

Professor Robert Miller, then of American University, pumped for PRSA to take on the accrediting tasks itself:

> You said educators wouldn't buy it. Here's one educator who would buy it. And I think there are others, perhaps, who would not go along with ACEJ. Let me take a different point. PRSA has just developed an accrediting body within itself for practitioners which we all seem to feel is an excellent idea and a tremendous service to the Society. Now, if they can do that in a relatively short period of time, I'm not convinced they can't come up with an accrediting body for courses and curriculums (sic) in a relatively short time. Also, if the Society accredits practitioners and we turn over accreditation of courses to ACEJ, it seems to me that the Society is accrediting the finished product without really having control over the courses and curriculums (sic) that are training the people who will become the practitioners.

But Professor William Ehling of the Newhouse College of Syracuse University, argued that PRSA would not be successful if it tried to go its separate way on accreditation:

> The presidents (of the colleges) have accepted the ACEJ across the country. If anyone else tries to get into the act he just won't get recognized. PRSA can't go knocking on doors and ask to accredit, nor will PRSA be invited to do so. The ACEJ on the other hand can ask PRSA to come into its program and ask PRSA to recommend someone to serve on an accrediting team. This is where PRSA can play an important role. Of course PRSA can set up its own accrediting body, but whether it would get anywhere or mean anything I would seriously doubt.

Dr. Kenneth Owler Smith, then assistant to the dean for university extension at the University of California at Los Angeles, proposed a compromise solution with PRSA joining ACEJ to accredit the public relations sequences in schools of journalism, but going its separate way to "endorse" (not accredit) public relations sequences in other schools and departments of the universities.[19]

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[19]Letter from Dr. Kenneth Owler Smith to John F. Moynahan, chairman of the PRSA Study Commission on Accreditation of College Public Relations Courses, dated September 5, 1967. (In PRSA files.)

Moynahan Commission Formed

By the time the Smith letter was written in September, 1967, the president of PRSA had appointed a study commission under the chairmanship of John F. Moynahan, a prominent public relations counselor in New York City. A PRSA staff report prepared as background for the deliberations of the commission members noted:

> Virtually all other professional societies participate in the accrediting of courses offered by institutions of higher learning to prepare students for their profession. Usually this takes the form of representation on the evaluation teams which examine for accreditation.
>
> It is self-evident that the public relations student should have the type of educational training which will make him acceptable as an employee of the practicing professionals, which properly prepares him to develop into a public relations executive, and which gives him the essential basis for PRSA Accreditation. The experience and practical knowledge of PRSA members can be a vital ingredient in helping insure that the courses and curriculum provide this training.
>
> The present PRSA study was precipitated by the fact that public courses in schools of journalism are now being accredited by the American Council on Education for Journalism. At least eight institutions have public relations courses which are ACEJ accredited, but PRSA has played no part in the accrediting process and no practicing public relations executive has served on an ACEJ evaluation team. The accrediting committee is made up of professors of journalism and public relations and representatives from media.
>
> ACEJ recognizes that the lack of PRSA representation is a weakening factor in the program and is urging PRSA to become a member of ACEJ and provide representatives for accrediting teams.
>
> One of the professional functions of a professional society is to play an appropriate role in accrediting educational courses which prepare students for the profession.

> The PRSA Study Commission has the responsibility to determine the appropriate role, the one which will best fulfill the Society's obligation with respect to accrediting the public relations courses.[20]

When the PRSA study commission met on October 3, 1967 it had before it a formal request tendered by Professor Ehling on behalf of the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism, urging PRSA to become a contributing member of ACEJ.[21] As a result of its deliberations on October 3, the Moynahan study commission in its report to the PRSA Board of Directors and the PRSA Assembly in November, 1967, made the following recommendations:

> A. That PRSA recognize and commend ACEJ for the difficult pioneer work it has done in establishing a program to accredit public relations courses in schools of journalism,
>
> B. That PRSA join the ACEJ to assist in its accrediting process and cooperate with ACEJ to evolve the structure into an even more effective accrediting procedure,
>
> C. That PRSA discharge its professional responsibility to develop the basic body of knowledge upon which accrediting procedures should be based, and do this through a committee of the Society working closely with public relations educators and the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education, and
>
> D. That PRSA work independently and concurrently to explore and develop additional accrediting procedures for sequences in other schools and disciplines, working toward the ultimate goal of having its own accrediting program.[22]

PRSA Joins ACEJ

With the approval of the Board and Assembly, PRSA applied to ACEJ with a formal letter from Quentin Harvell, then executive director of the Society, to the then secretary-treasurer of ACEJ.[23] ACEJ subsequently

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[20] PRSA Study commission on Accreditation of College Public Relations Courses: Staff Report, dated August, 1967. (In PRSA files.)

[21] Letter from Professor William P. Ehling to Paul P. Moynahan, chairman of the PRSA Study Commission on Accreditation of College Public Relations Courses, dated September 14, 1967. (In PRSA files.)

[22] Report of the PRSA Study Commission on Accreditation of College Public Relations Courses, November, 1967. (In PRSA files.)

[23] Letter from Quentin L. Harvell to John E. Stempel, dated March 27, 1968. (In PRSA files.)

voted in April 1968 to accept PRSA as a constituent member for an annual contribution of $750.[24] Since that date, PRSA has been an active participant in ACEJ, being represented on the council by past president of PRSA, J. Carroll Bateman.

While the PRSA study commission continued to consider how PRSA might accredit the public relations sequences that were not conducted in schools of journalism, somewhere along the way the idea was lost. Abortive attempts were made to develop a relationship with the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business in St. Louis, Missouri, to determine whether that group, which is the official accrediting body for schools and colleges of business, would be interested in a relationship with PRSA similar to PRSA's relationship with ACEJ. Such a relationship with AACSB was never consummated. Meanwhile, PRSA seems to have lost interest in seeking to become an official accrediting organization itself. Abortive attempts were made also to establish relationships between PRSA and the regional accrediting associations, but these also faded away.

Nevertheless, within PRSA circles the debate over where public relations education should be located continues to this day. Many PRSA members still feel that public relations education should not be located in schools of journalism. One leader that takes this stand is Edward L. Bernays, a pioneer practitioner of public relations. In a recent article in Public Relations Quarterly Bernays said:

> From the vantage point of practicing public relations for over half a century, I consider it high time for those interested in preserving the profession to come to its aid now.
>
> I refer particularly to the need for ensuring the kind of college and university education that will serve as a foundation for the practice of the profession. My close examination of several comprehensive recent surveys of public relations higher education shows that, at the present time, in the United States and throughout

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[24] American Council on Education for Journalism. Minutes of the Annual Meeting, April 20-21, 1968, New York City.

the free world, there is a wide gap between what is taught and what should be taught to prepare young people for their public relations careers.

These surveys, and my personal observation of university and college courses and their students, reveal that public relations is treated by and large as a minor adjunct of schools of journalism and communications, when it should be treated as applied social science....

One immediate step is to remove accreditation of courses and sequences in public relations from the supervision of the Association for Education in Journalism. From the public's standpoint, having a body with that name accredit public relations courses and sequences is like having the surgical instrument manufacturers association accredit courses in surgery at medical colleges, or law book publishers associations accrediting law courses. Assuredly communications is an adjunct or ancillary activity in public relations. But the social sciences are its basis. If any outside body is to be concerned, besides the Public Relations Society of America, it might be some group like the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues....

Public Relations, in its own interest and the public interests, needs a new deal in higher education.[25]

Accredited Programs

In the 11 years since PRSA became officially a member of ACEJ, the number of accredited programs has grown to 18 as reported in ACEJ's official listing for 1978-79,[26] plus two sequences approved by ACEJ in the Spring, 1979. The programs now accredited include: Boston University; California State University, Fullerton; University of Southern California; University of Florida, Gainesville; University of South Florida; University of Georgia; Northern Illinois University; Kent State University; University of Maryland; Ohio State University; Ohio University; University of Oklahoma; University of Oregon; San Jose State University; University of Texas, Austin; and University of Wisconsin, Madison. The two newly accredited programs are at Bowling Green State University and Ball State University.

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[25]"Education for PR: A Call to Action" by Edward L. Bernays, Public Relations Quarterly, 23, (Fall 1978), p. 18.

[26]Accredited Journalism and Mass Communication Education, American Council on Education for Journalism, 1978, pp. 10-17.

Overall, there are 74 colleges and universities in the U.S. with one or more communications programs accredited by ACEJ, including 64 news-editorial programs, the largest category, 27 advertising programs and an assortment of other categories.[27]

Accrediting Policies and Criteria

Through its membership in ACEJ, PRSA has been represented on almost all of the accreditation teams sent out to colleges and universities where public relations sequences were submitted for evaluation since 1968. Obviously, not all programs seeking accreditation are approved. Approximately one in every three or four of the public relations programs that have been examined during the past 11 years have been refused accreditation, at least during the first evaluation. (Programs denied accreditation may reapply for subsequent evaluation at a later time.) The most common reasons for refusal of accreditation by ACEJ involve limitation of the faculty teaching public relations courses or inadequacy of the program content.

There are two sets of criteria applied in the actual evaluation of public relations programs. First there are the standards which ACEJ uses in general for all programs seeking accreditation or reaccreditation regardless of major or sequence. Additionally, certain informal criteria have evolved through the years which are specifically related to public relations programs. In effect, ACEJ conducts dual examinations. Commenting on these, ACEJ states:

> One (is) an examination of the entire unit, whether it is called a department, division, school or college. The second examination (is) of individual sequences or programs for which the unit has requested accreditation.[28]

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., p. 41.

General Standards

There are seven categories of minimum standards for accreditation in general, plus an eighth category relating specifically to master's degree programs. While full details are published annually in the ACEJ booklet, Accredited Journalism and Mass Communications Education, selected aspects are relevant to our discussion here. One of the standards under the Unit Objectives and Guidelines has been particularly controversial. This states that undergraduates should "achieve a ratio of approximately three-fourths/one-fourth of broad liberal arts and sciences to journalism."[29] This evaluation guideline is repeated in the Background Education section of the standards with the qualification that "in applying this general ratio, the council recognizes that certain courses labeled 'journalism' and 'mass communication' may be of a distinctly liberal nature. . ."[30]

Another of the standards, listed in the Professional Courses section, states:

> The required professional courses for a program should vary with the objectives of the program or sequence, but all students should be instructed in the basic elements of factual writing, editing, communications law, and the theory, history and responsibility of journalism and mass communications.[31]

This and other statements might be seen as reflecting a general "journalistic" orientation in ACEJ accreditation.

Visitation and Pre-Visit Reports

The specific guidelines used during the team evaluation include:

Scholarship and Teaching

1. Teaching effectiveness, vitality of faculty, emphasis on social responsibilities of public relations practitioners, adherence to curriculum objectives.

2. Quality of instruction in principles and objectives, techniques of public relations, integration of laboratory work in curriculum.

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[29] Ibid., p. 5.

[30] Ibid., p. 6.

[31] Ibid.

3. Correlation with supporting courses in journalism-news writing, editing, etc.; correlation with related courses in business, advertising, psychology, sociology, communications.

Relationships with Professionals

1. Opportunity for student contact with public relations professionals (including internships), evidence of effective faculty relationships with public relations professionals and professional organizations, professional services to media, agencies, associations, business and government.[32]

Additionally, a comprehensive Pre-Visit Report[33] is completed by the faculty of the school seeking accreditation. The lengthy report includes the findings and conclusions of the required "intensive program of self-study" of the school as a whole and of each of the sequences for which accreditation is requested. The report also includes individual teacher's records for each member of the faculty; detailed information about each course, with weekly course outlines; library records; enrollment data; employment records of graduates; and a wide variety of administrative information.

Public Relations Criteria

Supplementing all of the above standards and reports are the specific criteria applied to the public relations program. As developed by PRSA's representative to ACEJ, these include:

1. Consideration of whether the program consists of at least two core courses in public relations, plus a practicum or internship.

2. Consideration of the size of the instructional staff for public relations. Generally, it is desirable to have more than one instructor teaching the public relations courses so that the students are subjected to different viewpoints.

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[32]"Visitors Sequence Evaluation: Public Relations," American Council on Education for Journalism.

[33]Journalism/Communications Accreditation Pre-Visit Report, American Council on Education for Journalism.

3. Consideration of the professional background and experience of the instructional staff.

4. Consideration of whether local professionals in the field of public relations are brought into the program as guest lecturers, part-time instructors, etc.

5. Consideration of whether the program for the practicum or internship actually provides worthwhile work experience for the students.

6. Consideration of the theory content of the introductory course; that is, whether the course provides the students with a fundamental understanding of public relations concepts, principles and ethics.

7. Consideration of whether the students majoring in public relations are acquainted with significant current developments in the field of public relations practice through the reading of professional periodicals.

8. Consideration of the amount and kind of readings in the text and in supplementary books that are required of the students.

9. Consideration of the involvement of the public relations faculty in the Public Relations Society of America and in other professional organizations.

10. Consideration of the involvement of the public relations students in the Public Relations Student Society of America and related activities.

11. Consideration of the degree of success in placing public relations graduates in public relations jobs.

12. Consideration of the success achieved over the years in public relations careers by graduates from the public relations program.

It should be emphasized that these considerations have not been formally adopted by an appropriate sub-body of either ACEJ or PRSA. They are the result of one person's experience (the PRSA representative on ACEJ) as a member of some twenty ACEJ accreditation teams that have

observed public relations sequences over the last ten years.

In sum, however, what is looked for--or should be looked for--in public relations education programs at the bachelor's degree level are qualities that effectively combine theory and practice; and that produce graduates with a broad view of the public relations function who will be capable not only of handling an entry-level public relations job, but who will be able to move up and attain executive levels in their careers. The real test will come many years after graduation, when we see if a significant number of these students have moved into policy-level positions in managements.

ACEJ Makeup

Currently, ACEJ is composed of 19 organizations representing the professions, including PRSA, and three academic associations, American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism, Association for Education in Journalism, and American Society of Journalism School Administrators. The professional organizations include the American Newspaper Publishers Association, American Society of Magazine Editors, Associated Press Broadcasters Association, Associated Press Managing Editors Association, Broadcast Education Association, Inland Daily Press Association, International Association of Business Communicators, International Newspaper Advertising Executives, National Association of Broadcasters, National Conference of Editorial Writers, National Newspaper Association, National Press Photographers Association, Radio Television News Directors Association, Society of Professional Journalists, Southern Newspaper Publishers Association, Western Newspaper Foundation, and Women in Communications, Inc.

This membership makeup reflects one of the several specific criticisms raised by Wright in the earlier mentioned Public Relations Journal article.

He pointed out that most of the ACEJ member organizations are "without question directly related to print or broadcast journalism."[34] Wright further noted:

> The same holds true for individuals on the ACEJ committees. Only two of the professional members, Patricia Walker (no longer a member) and J. Carroll Bateman, APR, are members of PRSA; and none of the professors listed as education members or as members of the accrediting committee are known to be teachers or researchers of public relations.[35]

He concluded:

> While accreditation should not be for everyone (and few favor adjusting rules only so those not now accredited can become so approved), until PRSA and public relations professors themselves have more to do with the accreditation of public relations one might expect this dilemma to continue.[36]

It is worthy of note that no PRSA representative has ever been elected to the powerful ACEJ Accrediting Committee. This committee, as Wright noted above, does not include any professors who are known to be teachers or researchers of public relations. The committee reviews and makes recommendations to ACEJ for or against accreditation based on the written reports of the visiting evaluation team. Commenting on this committee, Bateman observed:

> The annual meeting of the Accrediting Committee is a lengthy affair and the discussions of the reports are detailed and sometimes impassioned. At such meetings, members of the respective teams may be, and often are, called upon to defend their recommendations.[37]

Alternatives to ACEJ Proposed

One additional issue raised in Wright's article and mentioned earlier deals with the question of which organization is best qualified to evaluate and accredit public relations education. Citing criticisms of the present procedure, including comments from Bernays, the article offers three

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[34] Wright, p. 28.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Bateman, 1978, p. 28.

alternatives to ACEJ:

> Those in Bernays' camp believe that organizations such as the Social Science Research Council, or the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues should accredit public relations schools.
>
> Others, particularly those who teach at non-accredited schools (including some from sequences that have been denied ACEJ accreditation), support a move to have PRSA—or, perhaps, the Foundation (for Public Relations Research and Education)—become the recognized agency to accredit university-based public relations programs.
>
> Still another group believes that the American Association of Schools and Colleges of Business (AASCB) should supervise the accreditation in question here.[38]

Responding to these suggestions for the establishment of an alternative organization as the official accrediting body for public relations educational programs, Bateman provided this detailed analysis of the possibilities of setting up and obtaining the necessary recognition from the appropriate authorities:

> As a matter of fact, gaining recognition as an "official accrediting agency" would be extremely difficult for PRSA (or other organizations). To obtain the designation under present conditions, PRSA would need first to set up a process for accreditation, win the general approval and support of public relations educators, and then win recognition from two hard-fisted agencies: the Council on Post-Secondary Accreditation (COPA), a privately sponsored organization designated as the official approval agency for accreditation organizations; and the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), which exerts control because its grants to colleges and universities are influenced, in part, by whether such institutions are accredited. Hence, HEW also must approve the accreditation agency and its procedures. The red tape involved in obtaining HEW approval is formidable, as ACEJ officials will attest. Even though ACEJ had been in business for many years when HEW stepped into the picture, it had difficulty obtaining HEW recognition.
>
> Now this is not to say that PRSA or some other appropriate organization could never gain COPA and HEW recognition. Maybe it could (and should) at some distant future date. But the time is not now, and until that happy day arrives, PRSA had better stick with ACEJ.[39]

Another aspect of the question as to which organization should be

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[38] Wright, p. 28.

[39] Bateman, 1978, p. 22.

accrediting public relations stems, in part, from a concern that ACEJ does not now evaluate for accreditation public relations programs in schools of business, or other schools not connected with journalism. Recognizing this as a valid concern that deserves attention, Bateman commented:

> However, it should be noted that ACEJ, under the guidelines established by COPA, could and would accredit public relations or advertising programs in business schools (or other schools) if it were requested to do so. However, the decision to make the requests lies with the deans and administrators of the schools of business, who so far have been unwilling to look to ACEJ.
>
> Some day, of course, this situation will have to be dealt with, and it should be. But at this stage, without the interest and cooperation of the American Association of Business School Administrators or the deans of the business schools involved, a quick solution is not likely.[40]

National Survey

Within the context of the historical perspective reviewed here and cognizant of the concerns and criticisms reflected, formally and informally, over a period of years by the growing number of public relations educators and professionals interested in the academic preparation of public relations students, this study sought to obtain the attitudes and opinions of a wide sampling of respondents on the issues involved. A 24-item questionnaire was designed to deal with the issues already presented and others related to accreditation concerns. The questions were necessarily rather general at this initial stage due to the lack of any known previous research relating to public relations accreditation and the limited relevant literature.

Selection of Subjects

Since this study's major focus related to ACEJ, the rationale was to select respondents who (1) would be at least generally familiar with the association and its accreditation policies and procedures, and (2) were directly involved and concerned with public relations education.

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[40] Ibid., p. 28.

For these reasons, the membership of the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism was selected as the sample. The 173 members of the division, as provided by AEJ, were surveyed in the Spring, 1979 using a mail questionnaire. There were 79 usable responses, a response rate of 45.7 percent.

The utilization of the AEJ Public Relations Division membership certainly does not represent the entire range of the more than 320 colleges and universities currently reported to be offering courses in public relations nationwide. Further, there apparently are a large number of public relations programs also offered in the nation's business departments or colleges. One recent estimate suggests that there are at least 113 such programs.[41] In view of these and other considerations, it might be valuable to expand the sampling base in further research.

Results

The AEJ Public Relations Division members were first asked to respond to a series of Likert scale questions by indicating whether they strongly agreed, agreed, had no opinion, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with statements based on the concerns previously discussed.[42]

There was 63.3 percent agreement overall by the subjects to the statement regarding ACEJ being the "best" accrediting organization for public relations programs, with 29.1 percent of the 79 respondents indicating they strongly agreed with this position and another 34 percent agreeing. Almost 23 percent indicated disagreement (15.2 percent) or strong disagreement. (See Table 1.)

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[41] Walker, p. 1.

[42] The authors wish to acknowledge Cash Murphey, a graduate student in Communication at the University of Southern California for his assistance in conducting the computer analysis of the survey data with the guidance of his professor, Dr. David T. Burhans, Jr.

Table 1: Attitudes concerning current accrediting organization and policies.

	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No answer*
1. ACEJ is the best accrediting organization for public relations?	29.1%	34.2%	13.9%	15.2%	7.6%	-
2. Current ACEJ standards for accrediting public relations are generally correct?	5.1%	55.1%	21.8%	14.1%	3.8%	(1)
3. Current accreditation policies and procedures are helpful in improving public relations education over-all?	19.5%	50.6%	23.4%	6.5%	-	-
4. Currently, ACEJ is too "journalistic" in its orientation to be the best accrediting agency for public relations?	11.4%	24.1%	10.1%	41.8%	12.7%	-

(*Total N = 79)

In a related question in which respondents were asked to select the specific organization which they believed was the best one to accredit public relations, 57.1 percent of those answering the question (N = 77) checked ACEJ, slightly less than for the above question. PRSA ranked second, with 19.5 percent, or 15 respondents, compared with 44 who preferred ACEJ. Six respondents (7.8 percent) selected the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education. Another 12 respondents (15.6 percent) proposed an alternative to the above three organizations, with most (10) favoring a combination accrediting body composed of ACEJ and PRSA. Recognizing that the current procedure involves PRSA within ACEJ, this might be an

indication of a desire for stronger participation by PRSA. When the total of the later three categories involving PRSA or the Foundation are combined, 33 or the 77 subjects (42.9%) indicated opposition to the present ACEJ procedure.

Table 2: Preferences for accrediting organization.

	ACEJ	PRSA	Foundation	Other	No answer*
Which of the following organizations do you believe is the best one to accredit public relations?	57.1%	19.5%	7.8%	15.6%	(2)

(*Total N = 79)

In responses to the statement that "Currently, ACEJ is too 'journalistic' in its orientation to be the best accrediting agency for public relations education programs," a total of 35.5 percent of the subjects indicated that they agreed (24.1 percent) or strongly agreed (11.4 percent) with that statement. However, a total of 54.5 percent disagreed (41.8 percent) or strongly disagreed (12.7 percent) with the notion that ACEJ is currently too "journalistic." (See Table 1.)

Relating to a similar issue, the membership of ACEJ, a total of 68.4 percent of the subjects responding to the question expressed disapproval (44.7 percent) or strong disapproval (23.7 percent) of the current situation which Wright's article described as under representing public relations.[43] On the companion question of public relations educators membership on the ACEJ Accrediting Committee, 68.1 percent of the respondents disapproved (38.9 percent) or strongly disapproved (29.2 percent) of the current makeup in which none of the members "are known to be

[43] Wright, p. 28.

teachers or researchers of public relations." (See Table 3.)

Table 3: Attitudes toward current membership of ACEJ and the accrediting committees.

	Strongly approve	Approve	No opinion	Disapprove	Strongly disapprove	No answer*
1. ACEJ membership described in recent article as not including public relations teachers or researchers?	1.3%	5.3%	25.0%	44.7%	23.7%	(3)
2. Accrediting committee membership as not including teachers or researchers of public relations?	1.4%	5.6%	25.0%	38.9%	29.2%	(7)

(*N = 79)

In connection with Carroll's finding[44] that there were no significant differences between accredited and non-accredited journalism curricula, there was an almost even split among the respondents (N = 75) as to whether this also applied to public relations curricula. Slightly more, 37.4 percent agreed (30.7 percent) or strongly agreed that it did, while a total of 33.3 percent disagreed (25.3 percent) or strongly disagreed with the possibility that there were no differences between accredited and non-accredited programs in public relations.

Subjects were also asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with three specific standards applied in the accrediting evaluation of public relations programs. (See Table 4.)

[44]Carroll, p. 42.

Table 4: Attitudes toward selected existing public relations accrediting standards.

	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No answer*
1. To qualify for accreditation, public relations programs should have at least three PR courses?	50.0%	39.7%	2.6%	6.4%	1.3%	(1)
2. Programs with only one full time public relations professor or less should not be accredited?	19.0%	34.2%	11.4%	21.5%	13.9%	-
3. To qualify for accreditation, public relations programs should use professionals as part of the instructional program?	15.2%	46.8%	11.4%	16.5%	10.1%	-

(*Total N = 79)

Subjects were strongly supportive of the criterion that programs qualifying for accreditation should have at least three public relations courses (one of which may be a practicum). Fifty percent expressed strong agreement with this standard and another 39.7 percent were in agreement.

Support was also expressed for the standard that programs with only one full time public relations professor or less should not be accredited. Although not as strong as above, 53.2 percent agreed (34.2 percent) or strongly agreed with this criterion, compared with 35.4 percent who disagreed (21.5 percent) or strongly disagreed, while 11.4 percent (9 subjects) offered no opinion.

A similar, although slightly stronger, degree of agreement was found for the third standard to the effect that public relations programs should use professionals as part of the instructional program to qualify for accreditation. A total of 62 percent agreed (46.8 percent) or strongly agreed with the criterion. There were 21 subjects, a total of 26.6 percent who disagreed (16.5 percent) or strongly disagreed with the standard, while 11.4 percent again offered no opinion.

Asked if the current ACEJ standards for accrediting public relations programs are generally correct, 60.2 percent of those responding (78 subjects) agreed (55.1 percent) or strongly agreed while 14.1 percent indicated disagreement and 3.8 percent strongly disagreed. There were 17 (21.8 percent) who indicated no opinion. (See Table 1.)

Another question dealt with the appropriateness of the ACEJ standard of requiring a ratio of about one-fourth to three-fourths between mass communications courses and courses in liberal arts and sciences. A total of 62.2 percent (57 of the 79 subjects) expressed agreement (36.7 percent) or strong agreement (35.4 percent) with the 25-75 rule. A total of 25.3 percent indicated disagreement (21.5 percent) or strong disagreement with the appropriateness of the 25-75 rule for public relations education. For the 20 respondents who preferred a change in the ratio, most wanted more mass communication courses (14 respondents, or 70 percent). The remaining six subjects preferred more liberal arts and sciences than the current ACEJ standards allow.

Two additional Likert type questions sought to determine the subjects' attitudes relating to the possible benefits to be derived from accreditation of public relations programs.

In response to the statement that current policies and procedures are helpful in improving public relations education overall, a total of

70.1 percent of those answering the question (77 subjects) either agreed (50.6 percent) or strongly agreed. Only 5 respondents (6.5 percent) expressed disagreement. Eighteen (23.4 percent) offered no opinion and two failed to answer. (See Table 1.)

There was somewhat less support for the related statement that the benefits of public relations accreditation make it worth the financial costs. A total of 66.7 percent agreed (43.6 percent) or strongly agreed with the statement. Almost 13 percent were in disagreement (10.6 percent) or strong disagreement (2.6 percent) with the statement. Sixteen percent expressed no opinion and one subject did not respond.

In addition to the above questions and several designed to provide descriptions of the subjects relating to such aspects as membership in PRSA, teaching responsibilities and which, if any, programs are currently accredited at their respective schools, the survey provided respondents with the opportunity to write in comments on (1) major reasons believed to be involved with why there were only 16 accredited programs in public relations at the time of the survey, and (2) pros and cons of accreditation for public relations.

These open-ended questions resulted in a large volume of often detailed comments from the membership of the AEJ Public Relations Division. While it is not possible to incorporate all of these responses in this study, a number will be presented here that are representative of the overall comments.

Suggested Reasons for Limited PR Accreditation

Commenting on what he believed to be among the major reasons why there were only 16 accredited public relations programs (at the time of the survey) among the 74 schools with one or more accredited programs, one California educator observed:

> Public relations is a relatively new field (within the past 20 years) and most universities have an orientation toward development of news-reporting type courses. This is slowly changing as newspaper jobs become scarce and large numbers of J-graduates are finding themselves in public relations activities as an alternative. In addition, statistics show that the second largest employment area of all J-graduates is now public relations. In comparison t the total enrollment of J-schools, PR is still a small factor--accounting for only about 10-15 percent of the enrollments. Quite simply, most J-schools haven't put the energy into developing PR degree programs--all too often, there simply is a token introductory course.

These comments are quite typical of those offered by a number of other respondents. The relative newness of public relations was one of the most frequent reasons cited. This was expressed in a variety of ways, including some respondents who viewed the consequences as "natural" therefore in giving priority to accrediting news-editorial sequences before public relations. Other respondents voiced a certain criticism of the current situation. One Ohio respondent commented: "The basic reason is jealousy on the part of news faculty . . . News professors fight like tigers to force PR students to take all of the required news courses. This means the PR student then has only a few hours left to take PR courses." Another respondent cited the "'weak sister' role too often assigned to PR by 'green eyeshades.'"

An educator from Pennsylvania responded:

> This fact is indicative of the sit ion public relations education is in. On the one hand, "supermarket" educators proliferate academic courses that look impressive in the dossier but contribute little to student's education. On the other hand, some practitioners expect a "paint-by-numbers" approach. They expect the colleges to offer a variety of specialized courses, each teaching a skill such as "planning Displays and Exhibits," "Special Events Organization," "Speech Writing," etc. Both sides have lost confidence in the liberally educated persons who, having learned the basic skills, can apply them efficiently, effectively and creatively to each situation they encounter. One major fault, then, is that we find it difficult to define a good education for the practice of public relations. Until we come up with a good definition, probably the most honest accreditation would be based on employer evaluations of the products of PR education programs.

Several respondents leveled their criticism directly at public

relations education. A Californian said, "PR is often poorly taught," and a Washington respondent said there is a "lack of scholarship in PR." And several, including a Wisconsin respondent, noted a "shortage of qualified public relations educators." A few echoed an Ohio educator who commented that "too few educators understand what PR is and how it relates to communication. The education must begin among educators by PR professionals."

Advantages/Strengths

Suggested advantages and strengths of accreditation that were found in the survey were quite varied. For example, a New York respondent saw "some self-policing of what and how PR is taught," while a West Virginian believed that accreditation provided "increased status within PRSA." The reactions were mixed on the values that accreditation might offer for students. Some respondents, such as one from Washington, thought accreditation made it "easier for students to be accepted in graduate schools." Others thought it helped recruit students as well as faculty, and some thought it helped students in getting a job.

There were also several respondents who suggested that seeking accreditation might help in providing an incentive for improving the public relations program, especially in obtaining resources and support.

Disadvantages/Weaknesses

In answer to what possible disadvantages or weaknesses might accompany accreditation, a number of respondents cited high costs and the time and effort involved in obtaining accreditation. While this item generally received the fewest responses among the open-ended questions, several individuals commented on the potential for stifling creativity and innovation. One respondent observed:

> The overall dilemma of AEJ in my opinion is a relentless trend toward increasing specialization and fragmentation. Plenary sessions and co-disciplinary sponsorship of programs

attempts to offset the divided household affect, but with marginal results. To the degree that accreditation of PR programs incorporates a movement toward increased professionalization of what I insist on perceiving as a calling of generalists, to that degree PR forfeits its most legitimate reason for being, namely to translate into more understandable terms all the other specialities, within journalism and without. To a degree that concerns me, literature concerning PR education (including accreditation) seems to extoll this turn of events.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The accreditation of public relations academic programs has demonstrated significant progress in the last decade, since PRSA became a member of ACEJ. Nevertheless, there is a need for substantial continued development and refinement in the accreditation process as it relates to public relations education if accreditation is to meet its potential for and assist in the improvement of this relatively new, rapidly growing and rapidly changing field of mass communication.

Interpretation of the survey results suggests general support among members of the Public Relations Division of ACEJ for the continuation of ACEJ as the official accrediting agency for public relations sequences in schools and colleges of journalism and communications. However, it is also indicated that public relations educators and practitioners (through PRSA) should have a more active role in the existing accreditation process.

The history of past abortive efforts to find a means of accrediting public relations programs outside the journalism/communications discipline suggests the desirability of a renewed effort--presumably by PRSA--to find a method of accomplishing this objective.

Some of the sharpest criticism relating to the ACEJ accreditation process as it relates to public relations programs has focused on the fact that public relations educators and practitioners have only limited representation in and influence upon ACEJ, which is dominated by the journalism fraternity. This situation calls for prompt correction. One

of the co-authors of this paper already has written to the Executive Secretary of the ACEJ Accrediting Committee suggesting the addition of public relations educators and practitioners to that important committee. This proposal merits the support of both the Public Relations Division and PRSA, in the light of the increasing numbers of public relations sequences and public relations students.

Fundamental to the whole problem of developing criteria for the accreditation of public relations programs in journalism/communications schools--or in any other discipline, for that matter--is the defining of the basic body of knowledge for public relations practice, upon which the ultimate criteria should be based. This long-overdue effort--often attempted, but without success to date--also deserves the joint attention of the Public Relations Division and PRSA. This task will not be accomplished swiftly, but until it is done, and the ultimate criteria are available, interim criteria, commonly acceptable to public relations educators and practitioners, are needed.

The survey results reported in this paper suggest that there is substantial agreement on the three specific accreditation standards for public relations education which were presented in the questionnaire. This paper has also suggested a more complete list of 12 specific standards that may be applied in the evaluation of public relations programs. A more careful consideration of these criteria (which so far represent only the views of the authors) would seem to be a necessity. This subject merits the joint attention of the Public Relations Division and PRSA. A joint commission of these two organizations should be established to review, amend and formalize these criteria in the form of a recommendation to ACEJ.

The intention of this paper, and of the related survey of the views

of AEJ members, is to provide added insights into the nature and implications of national accreditation for the growing academic field of public relations; to focus attention upon this important subject, and, finally, to promote further discussion and research relating to the matter. In the light of these ends, the authors earnestly hope that they have provided background and some new perspectives for continued examination of the accreditation process by both the ACEJ Public Relations Division and PRSA.